

requires, its Tartini backbone scored for transverse flute but Vivaldi's perennially popular RV443 and the Sammartini F major Concerto being soprano recorder works, and Vivaldi's RV441 for alto recorder. Still, impressive and tonally varied as this horizontal and vertical buffet is, it's the Tartini that's of most interest, simply because the Sammartini and Vivaldi works are already so often recorded (and indeed personally I enjoyed the greater tempo contrasts recently brought to the Sammartini by Maurice Steger on his 'Souvenirs d'Italie' – Harmonia Mundi, 2/17).

The Tartini concertos, on the other hand, are far lesser-spotted, not least because they're transcriptions of what were really solo violin works, albeit contemporaneously arranged. Furthermore, they appear here in beautifully rendered form, their many ornamentations smoothly and almost imperceptibly brought off in the up-tempo outer movements and tangibly augmenting the slow movements' emotional affective weight. Les Ambassadeurs meanwhile are light and graceful of footprint, soft and smooth of attack and texture (in fact *nota bene* that it's Classical-style refinement rather than full-on Baroque bristle, even in Vivaldi's RV443), and interpretationally glued to Kossenko's side.

So, while I'm beginning to think there should be a recording amnesty on those Vivaldi and Sammartini concertos, the Tartini might well be worth your coin.

Charlotte Gardner

Scriabin

Piano Concerto, Op 20^a. Symphony No 2, Op 29

*Kirill Gerstein *pf*

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko
LAWO © LWC1139 (77' • DDD)



While Scriabin's Second Symphony is arguably the most conventional of his five from a melodic and harmonic standpoint, it's not a work that plays itself. In the central *Andante*, for instance, a conductor has to determine tempos that bring out the music's expansive lyrical nature while preventing it from rambling. And do we treat what Scriabin called his 'military parade' finale as a cumulative extension of what came before, or simply let rip and bait the audience? Or both, if possible? Suffice it to say that the Oslo Philharmonic and their chief conductor

Vasily Petrenko brilliantly navigate these challenges, and thereby raise the work's interpretative bar on disc for vivid detailing, clear yet voluptuous textures, and taking the composer's expressive directives seriously.

The first movement is a case in point, where the undulating string accompaniments supporting the excellent first-desk solos are appropriately billowy yet rhythmically defined. Dovetailing directly into the second-movement *Allegro*, Petrenko and his musicians bring lithe, forward-moving ensemble unity to the first theme and the final peroration, as well as shapely contouring of slower, more exposed passages (such as the one for clarinet and strings about 7'07" into the movement). Although the aforementioned third-movement *Andante* times out to more than 18 minutes (compared to Muti/Philadelphia's 13, for example), Petrenko's linear trajectory generates a sense of tension and release that consistently holds your attention; the deliciously scurrying woodwinds in the movement's first few minutes alone signify felicities up ahead. While the tempestuous fourth movement doesn't quite match Golovschin's Naxos version for unbridled sizzle, the Oslo players' superiority on all levels compensates, and the finale's transparent orchestral strands and playful demeanour cut through the conventional bluster.

In the Concerto's first movement, soloist Kirill Gerstein and the orchestra largely interact in a chamber-like manner; the soloist is not afraid to pull back and accompany when others have the big tunes. He takes the thicker, full-bodied chordal climaxes in symphonic stride, rather than italicising them, channelling his considerable virtuosity towards the bigger musical picture. At the same time, I miss the wider dynamic range and palette of characterisation distinguishing Vladimir Ashkenazy's benchmark recording, notably in the second-movement variations. To cite just one example, notice Gerstein's straightforward transitional measure into the *Allegro scherzando* second variation and the supple yet soft-grained edge to that variation's piano/orchestra interplay. By contrast, Ashkenazy personalises and dramatises the transition, followed by a faster-paced variation where the orchestra's interjectory flourishes cut through with far more impact. The finale fares best; here the polished synchronicity between Gerstein and Petrenko gains considerable dynamism along the lines of the recent Sudbin/Litton/Bergen recording. To sum up the performances: the concerto is memorable, the symphony is indispensable. **Jed Distler**

Symphony – selected comparisons:

Philadelphia Orch, Muti

(11/90^a, 3/02) (EMI/WARN) 567720-2

Moscow SO, Golovschin (2/97) (NAXO) 8 553581

Piano Concerto – selected comparison:

Sudbin, Bergen PO, Litton (3/15) (BIS) BIS2088

Shostakovich

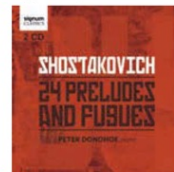
Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 35^a; No 2, Op 102^b.

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 12; No 2, Op 61

Peter Donohoe *pf* *Hugh Davies *tp*

^{ab}Orchestra of the Swan / David Curtis

Signum © SIGCD493 (80' • DDD)



What a sensible idea to programme both of Shostakovich's concertos with the two

piano sonatas, with the early First Sonata getting a rare outing on disc. Shostakovich was just 20 when he wrote it – 12-plus minutes of sheer intensity. Donohoe is an assured and sympathetic guide through its sometimes gnarly textures, encapsulating both its moments of heightened Scriabinesque writing and its Prokofievian energy. In his hands, the intensity never sags and he patently relishes its bravado ending. Shostakovich's piano teacher Leonid Nikolayev was nonplussed by it: 'a sonata for metronome to the accompaniment of piano' was his pithy verdict. Yet Shostakovich clearly forgave him, for the Second Sonata of 1943 is an *in memoriam* to his teacher. Donohoe captures the quiet desperation that underpins much of the lean-textured opening *Allegro*. There's no room to hide in this piece, and occasionally I wanted more palpable beauty in the grave slow movement, but in the variation-form finale, which begins so unassumingly, Donohoe relishes Shostakovich's occasional bursts of more energetic writing without losing sight of its essentially elegiac tone.

For the two concertos, he's joined by the Orchestra of the Swan. He's perhaps more at home in the First Concerto, with stylish trumpet-playing from the under-credited Hugh Davies. Together they find the right degree of jokiness without exaggeration in the outer movements. But the competition is tough and Melnikov has a secret weapon in the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, who are tremendously alive to the colours conjured by Shostakovich, while Hamelin has a lightness of touch that is very infectious. In the slow movement, Donohoe sounds almost prosaic alongside Melnikov's caressing way with the piano phrases. And let's not forget Argerich's extraordinary account of this piece, superbly, wildly impetuous in the best possible manner.